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DECEMBER 17, 1973

FOR: PETER RODMAN
FROM: DICK SMYER

PETER: I HAVE NOW SEEN WINSTON LORD'S MESSAGE REGARDING OUR MEETING WITH LE DUC THO. PLEASE PASS THE FOLLOWING COMMENTS TO LARRY AND THE SECRETARY:

" I CONCUR WITH WIN'S RECOMMENDATION THAT WE SHOULD BE MAKING PREPARATIONS FOR ANOTHER MEETING IN THE NEW YEAR, AND WITH HIS PREFERENCE FOR SCHEDULING ANY FUTURE MEETING AS LATE AS POSSIBLE. SUCH A MEETING WILL HAVE LITTLE VALUE IN RESOLVING ISSUES, BUT WE DID VAGUELY PROPOSE A LATER MEETING. (THE NORTH VIETNAMESE HAVE INTERPRETED THIS AS MEANING THAT A LATER MEETING WILL BE HELD "SHOULD IT BE NECESSARY.")

I ALSO CONCUR THAT WE SHOULD APPOINT GRAHAM MARTIN TO HANDLE ANY ANCILLARY TALKS WITH THACH, IF WE EVER GET DRAFTING. HOWEVER, THE NORTH VIETNAMESE WILL BE PRIMARILY INTERESTED IN ASSURING FUTURE TALKS BETWEEN YOU AND THO AND MIGHT NOT ACCEPT THACH AND MARTIN NOW AS SURROGATES. WE SHOULD PROPOSE MARTIN IF HE THINKS HE CAN KEEP HIS SANITY AS WELL AS HIS RELATIONS WITH THIEU.

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I DO NOT CONCUR WITH WIN'S RECOMMENDATIONS THAT WE SHOULD ON DECEMBER 20 OR SHORTLY THEREAFTER ANNOUNCE DEFINITE PLANS FOR ANOTHER MEETING. THERE IS NO SENSE COMMITTING OURSELVES FORMALLY TO A SESSION THAT MIGHT BE HELD AGAINST A BACKGROUND OF A NORTH VIETNAMESE OFFENSIVE. IT WOULD BE BETTER, IF WE HAVE TO SAY SOMETHING PUBLIC, TO STATE THAT " THE TWO PARTIES AGREED TO HOLD FURTHER MEETINGS AS APPROPRIATE." PRIVATELY WE SHOULD TELL THO (AND, OF COURSE, THIEU) THAT FUTURE MEETING PLANS WILL BE RELATED TO DRV BEHAVIOR (E.G., CESSATION OF ATTACKS AND OFFENSIVE

ON-FILE NSC RELEASE
INSTRUCTIONS APPLY

*****WHSR COMMENT*****

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PREPARATIONS.) IF UNCERTAINTY ABOUT A MEETING OFFERS US ANY LEVERAGE, WE MIGHT AS WELL USE IT.

I ALSO DO NOT CONCUR THAT WE SHOULD ASK THE NORTH VIETNAMESE TO SUBMIT A SPECIFIC PROGRAM OF ACTION ON TIGHTENING THE CEASEFIRE, OR SHOULD OFFER ONE OURSELVES. WE KNOW IN ADVANCE THAT WE WILL ASK THEM TO STOP INFILTRATION AND PULL BACK THEIR FORCES, WHICH THEY WILL NOT DO EXCEPT UNDER DURESS. WE ALSO KNOW THAT THEY WILL ASK US TO PUSH THE GVN TOWARD THEIR INTERPRETATION OF POLITICAL CONDITIONS, WHICH THE GVN WILL NOT DO EXCEPT UNDER DURESS. I SEE NO REASON TO INVITE THIS KIND OF FRICTION UPON OUR OWN HEADS.

IF WE HOPE TO USE THESE MEETINGS FOR CONGRESSIONAL SUPPORT, WE CANNOT ACCOMPANY THEM WITH AN OPEN BATTLE AGAINST THE GVN OVER SUCH A PROGRAM OF ACTION. THE CONGRESS IS NOW MORE READY THAN EVER TO OPPOSE THE PRESIDENT, AND THAT KIND OF BATTLE WOULD GIVE IT A PERFECT EXCUSE TO CUT AID TO THE GVN (AS IT IS ALREADY DOING) RATHER THAN TO SUPPORT PRESSURE AGAINST THE NORTH. JOHN LEHMAN BELIEVES THAT OUR HESITATION TO HOLD FUTURE TALKS, ESPECIALLY DURING AN OFFENSIVE, WILL NOT GIVE US ANY GREAT PROBLEMS WITH CONGRESS. HE FEELS THAT THE DECEMBER 20 MEETING WILL SUFFICE IN CONVINCING THOSE IN CONGRESS WHO CAN BE CONVINCED THAT WE MADE A SERIOUS EFFORT TO DEFLECT THE OTHER SIDE FROM OFFENSIVE ACTION.

I WILL NOT ADD ANY EXTENSIVE HOMILIES ABOUT NORTH VIETNAMESE TACTICS IN RELATING MILITARY ACTIONS TO NEGOTIATIONS. YOU KNOW MY VIEWS, BASED ON EXPERIENCE AND ON HANOI DOCTRINE. THE OTHER SIDE REGARDS INCREASED MILITARY PRESSURE AS ESSENTIAL IN BRINGING ABOUT NEGOTIATIONS AND ACHIEVING FAVORABLE DIPLOMATIC RESULTS.

OF COURSE, AS WIN HIMSELF SAYS, PROSPECTS FOR NEGOTIATION DO INCITE INCIDENTS SUCH AS RECENT QUANG DUC ATTACKS AND THE AMBUSH OF THE U.S. MIA TEAM LAST WEEK.

WE CAN ONLY CHANGE HANOI'S MIND ABOUT ANOTHER OFFENSIVE BY CONVINCING THE NORTH VIETNAMESE THAT WE CAN AND WILL FORCE THE GVN TO MEET COMMUNIST TERMS OR BY CONVINCING THEM SUCH AN OFFENSIVE COULD WELL LEAD TO A U.S. MILITARY RESPONSE. DESPITE EVERYTHING, HANOI IS STILL NOT CERTAIN THAT WE ARE TOTALLY IMPOTENT IN EITHER REGARD.

IT IS CLEAR THAT THE NORTH VIETNAMESE WANT TO CATCH US AGAIN BETWEEN THEMSELVES AND THE SOUTH VIETNAMESE. THEY ALSO WANT TO EXERCISE MILITARY PRESSURE AGAINST THE GVN WHILE WE EXERT POLITICAL PRESSURE. IT IS AN ABVIOUS AND NOT TERRIBLY ORIGINAL GAME, AND I SEE NO REASON FOR US TO PLAY IT ANY MORE THAN ABSOLUTELY ESSENTIAL.

I LOOK FORWARD TO SEEING YOU WEDNESDAY EVENING IN PARIS, AT YOUR CONVENIENCE.

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AS ALWAYS, DICK SMYSER

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